



ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING PROGRAM

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

The environment plays an important role in health and human development. Researchers have linked specific diseases with exposures to some environmental hazards, such as the link between lung cancer and exposure to asbestos. However, other links remain unproven, such as the suspected link between bladder cancer and exposure to disinfectant by-products. Currently, no systems exist at the state or national level to track many of the exposures and health effects that may be related to environmental hazards. Environmental public health tracking (EPHT) is the ongoing collection, integration, analysis and interpretation of data about the following: (1) environmental hazards, (2) exposure to environmental hazards, and (3) health effects potentially related to exposure to environmental hazards. The goal of environmental public health tracking is to protect communities by providing information to federal, state, and local agencies. These agencies, in turn, will use this information to plan, apply, and evaluate public health actions to prevent and control environmentally related diseases.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC's goal is to develop a national environmental public health tracking network that will (1) be standards-based, (2) enable direct electronic reporting and linkage of data on health effects, exposures, and hazards, and (3) interconnect with other public health systems. Beginning in the fall of 2001, CDC assembled four workgroups to develop recommendations for the environmental public health tracking program. The workgroups, which included representatives from 30 organizations, worked on such topics as organization, data technology, needs assessment, and public health action. Currently, CDC has an internal workgroup for coordinating activities and collaborations across categorical programs throughout the agency.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

CDC recently awarded \$14.2 million to 20 state and local health departments and 3 schools of Public Health to begin developing a national environmental public health tracking network and to increase capacity in environmental health at the state and local levels.

The state and local health departments are being funded to:

- Build environmental public health capacity
- Increase collaboration between environmental and health agencies
- Identify and evaluate existing data systems
- Build partnerships with non-governmental organizations and communities
- Develop model systems that link data and can be used by other states or localities

The schools of Public Health will support state and local health departments and will investigate possible links between health effects and the environment.

As additional funding becomes available, CDC plans to:

- Fund additional state, local, territorial, and tribal health departments to increase their capacity building and demonstration projects
- Fund additional schools of Public Health to develop Centers of Excellence in EPHT
- Fund technical development activities required to support a national network
- Assess stakeholder information needs for future data dissemination activities
- Expand training and education activities in collaboration with national and professional organizations

For more information about this or other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/programs.

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